

CLAIMS:

1. A method for optically determining a physical attribute of an object moving along a defined path, the method comprising the steps of:
 - 5 fixing one or more cameras, each camera being located to view the object when the object is at a trigger location;
 - fixing one or more fanned lasers, each laser being located outside the path and projecting a laser beam along its laser plane onto the object when the object is at the trigger location, the intersection of the laser plane with the object at the trigger location being visible by at least one of the cameras;
 - 10 optically establishing a mathematical spatial relationship between the cameras and the plane of each of the laser beams;
 - creating a pixelated image of the object in one or more of the cameras illuminated by the planar laser beams when the object is at the trigger location;
 - 15 selecting at least one pixel location in each image, the at least one pixel location corresponding to a point on the object illuminated by a laser beam;
 - 20 for each of the selected pixel locations, using the mathematical spatial relationship to establish the three dimensional position of the point based on the two dimensional position of the pixel location;
 - using the three dimensional position of the respective point to determine the physical attribute of the object.
 - 25
2. A method according to claim 1, wherein optically establishing a mathematical spatial relationship further comprises:
 - establishing an orientation and location of each camera with respect to a co-ordinate system;
 - 30 establishing an orientation of each laser plane within the co-ordinate system; and
 - deriving a transformation function for calculating the three dimensional position of points within the plane of each respective laser beam from the pixel location within a pixelated image.
 - 35
3. A method according to claim 2, wherein establishing an orientation and location of the camera further comprises:

temporarily mounting a calibration device having at least six non-collinear visible markings at known points on at least two non-parallel surfaces of the calibration device, the calibration device being positioned in the path and in view of each camera at a reference position such that each camera can view the at least six points;
for each camera, creating a first pixelated image of the calibration device; and using the known position of the at least six markings relative to the co-ordinate system and the pixel locations within the first image to establish a transformation equation between pixel locations and the three dimensional co-ordinates of the calibration device at the reference position.

4. A method according to claim 3, wherein establishing an orientation of each laser plane within the co-ordinate system further comprises:

illuminating the calibration device with each laser beam to form a line along the surface of the calibration device;
for each camera, creating a second pixelated image of the calibration device; and
using the position of at least three non-collinear points within the line relative to the co-ordinate system and the pixel locations corresponding to the positions of the points within the second image to establish an equation defining the orientation of the laser.

5. A method according to claim 4, wherein the second pixelated image is the first pixelated image.

6. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein a pixel location is defined to sub-pixel accuracy using image analysis techniques.

7. A method according to any one of claims 3 to 6, wherein the reference position is the trigger location.

8. A method according to any one of claims 3 to 7, wherein the two surfaces are planar and at least two points are located on each of the two surfaces.

9. A method according to any one of claims 3 to 8, wherein the two surfaces are orthogonal.

10. An optical method for determining a physical attribute of an object moving along a defined path, the method comprising:
- 5 fixing at least one fanned laser at a position outside of the path to project its laser beam onto the moving object when the moving object is at a trigger location;
- fixing at least one camera at a location to view the moving object when illuminated by the laser beam at the trigger location, each camera producing a digital image comprising an array of pixels;
- 10 forming a calibration device comprising two planar surfaces which intersect in a line forming an edge of the device and, at least six non-collinear visible points on the planar surfaces at known locations on the calibration device defining a calibration co-ordinate system;
- temporarily mounting the calibration device in the path in view of the at least one camera, and where illuminated by the at least one fanned laser;
- 15 producing an image of the device on each camera and determining for each of one or more pixel locations within the image an equation in terms of the calibration co-ordinate system, of a ray passing through a centre of lens of the camera which, when projected onto the device coincides with the pixel location;
- 20 determining an equation of a plane in the calibration co-ordinate system containing the fanned laser beam;
- removing the calibration device;
- taking an image of the object when illuminated by the at least one laser beam
- 25 at the trigger location and utilising the laser plane equations, determining a three dimensional location in the calibration co-ordinate system of selected pixel locations of the object illuminated by the at least one laser, and from the three dimensional locations determining physical attribute of the object.
- 30
11. An optical method according to claim 10, wherein forming the calibration device further comprises arranging the first and second planar surfaces at right angles to each other.
- 35
12. An optical method according to either claim 10 or 11, wherein forming the calibration device further comprises providing a third planar surface having a first edge coincident with an edge of the first planar surface distant the second planar surface, and

a fourth planar surface having a first edge coincident with an edge of the third planar surface distant the first planar surface, and a second edge coincident with an edge of the second planar surface distant the first planar surface.

- 5 13. An optical method according to claim 12, wherein the second and third planar surfaces are parallel to each other and the first and fourth planar surfaces are parallel to each other.
- 10 14. An optical method according to any one of claims 10 to 13, wherein fixing the at least one fanned laser comprises fixing two or more fanned lasers at respective locations outside of the path whereby the laser beams from each laser projects onto the moving object at different locations.
- 15 15. An optical method according to any one of claims 10 to 14, wherein fixing the at least one camera comprises fixing two or more cameras such that each camera is able to view the intersection of at least two laser beams with an object at the trigger location.
- 20 16. A method according to any one of claims 10 to 15, wherein a pixel location is defined to sub-pixel accuracy using image analysis techniques.
- 25 17. A method for optically establishing a mathematical spatial relationship between one or more cameras and one or more fanned lasers each capable of projecting a laser beam along a laser plane, the method comprising:
 establishing an orientation and location of each camera with respect to a co-
 ordinate system;
 establishing an orientation of each laser plane within the co-ordinate system;
 and
 deriving a transformation function for calculating the three dimensional
 position of points within the plane of each respective laser beam from a
30 pixel location within a pixelated image created by each of the cameras.
- 35 18. A method according to claim 17, wherein establishing an orientation and location of each camera further comprises:
 temporarily mounting a calibration device having at least six non-collinear
 visible markings at known points on at least two non-parallel surfaces of
 the calibration device, the calibration device being positioned in the path

and in view of the cameras at a reference position such that each camera can view the at least six points;

for each camera, creating a first pixelated image of the calibration device; and using the known position of the at least six markings relative to the co-ordinate system and the pixel locations within the first image to establish a transformation equation between pixel locations and the three dimensional co-ordinates of the calibration device at the reference position.

- 10 19. A method according to claim 18, wherein establishing an orientation of each laser plane within the co-ordinate system further comprises:
- illuminating the calibration device with each laser beam to form a line along the surface of the calibration device;
- for each camera, creating a second pixelated image of the calibration device;
- 15 and
- using the position of at least three non-collinear points within the line relative to the co-ordinate system and the pixel locations corresponding to the positions of the points within the second image to establish an equation defining the orientation of the laser.
- 20 20. A method according to claim 19, wherein the second pixelated image is the first pixelated image.